



## Findings from the Nutrition Services Program Process Study and Meal Cost Analysis – Live Webinar Questions

1. **Did the study gather reimbursement / income per meal data?**
  - The study did not gather information on reimbursement. A main goal of the analysis was to determine what it costs service providers to provide congregate and home-delivered meals as compared with what they are reimbursed for the meals.
2. **Did transportation costs get included in any of the per meal costs for the congregate dining sites?**
  - Yes. The study collected data on and included in the analysis the labor and non-labor (vehicles, gasoline, and car insurance) costs of transporting food from off-site kitchens to congregate meal sites.
3. **Will the report have any state specific information?**
  - No, the data were collected from a nationally representative sample of local service provider/meal providers. Data are presented by region, but not by state.
4. **Did total cost include NSIP?**
  - Yes. The study collected data on the value of commodities from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) and the value of donated food from other sources (such as food banks and General Mills). This information was included in the reported *total* average cost of each type of a meal as the value of donated non-labor resources - food; it was not included in the reported *paid* average cost of each type of meal.
5. **Please clarify the Value of Donations vs. Paid Costs again. Also, how are you addressing volunteer labor?**
  - The meal cost analysis accounted for the fact that many LSPs rely heavily on donated resources to sustain their programs, including volunteers who prepare, serve, and deliver meals; food that is donated; meal facilities provided at no cost (or “in-kind”) from community partners; and gasoline donated by meal delivery volunteers. The study team collected data on the monetary value of these resources—as estimated by service providers—to include in the meal cost estimates. The analysis differentiated these *total* per-meal costs (the sum of the cost of purchased items and the value of donated resources) from *paid* per-meal costs throughout the report. Paid per meal costs reflect only the average cost of what sites actually paid for.

To collect data on volunteers to include in the analysis, the study team asked service providers to estimate and report the value of the salary that would be paid to each volunteer if the work performed by the volunteer was performed by

paid staff, as estimated by LSPs. This would include volunteers who (a) provided centralized administrative support; (b) oversaw, planned, and prepared meals at congregate and home-delivered meal sites, and who served the congregate meals; and (c) delivered meals from off-site kitchens to meal sites and from meal sites to homes. The study team also collected information on the number of hours that each volunteer worked for the congregate and home-delivered meal programs or spent delivering meals along a selected route during a typical week.

The value of donations is the amount that a site would have to pay for volunteer labor or donated resources if they had to purchase them. Paid costs represent the actually amount paid by a provider for the resources (labor and non-labor)

#### **6. Final report will come out when?**

- *The final reports are now available on the ACL website at:*
  - i. *Process evaluation report:*  
[http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Program\\_Results/docs/Program\\_Eval/III\\_C\\_Assessment/NSP-Process-Evaluation-Report.pdf](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Program_Results/docs/Program_Eval/III_C_Assessment/NSP-Process-Evaluation-Report.pdf)
  - ii. *Cost Study report:*  
[http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Program\\_Results/docs/Program\\_Eval/III\\_C\\_Assessment/NSP-Meal-Cost-Analysis.pdf](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Program_Results/docs/Program_Eval/III_C_Assessment/NSP-Meal-Cost-Analysis.pdf)

#### **7. Can we have access to the formula for calculating meal cost the same exact way that you have here?**

- The meal cost analysis did not develop a formula for individual meal programs to use to calculate their own costs; rather, the team collected data from meal programs around the country with the objective of estimating the cost of a meal prepared around the country and in various contexts. A summary of the methods used to conduct the analysis is outlined below.

The study team used the ingredient, or resource cost, method to guide their data collection and analysis. This approach involves identifying a standard set of resources used to prepare, serve, and deliver meals, collecting data from Programs on the costs of each resource, and then calculating, or “building up,” estimates of the cost of congregate and home-delivered meals. For the analysis, the study team collected data on the following resources: paid labor, purchased food, vendor payments, non-food meal supplies, facilities (where meals are prepared, served, and packaged for delivery), equipment, vehicles, gasoline, car and other insurance and other costs.

Because many programs rely heavily on donated resources to sustain their programs, including volunteers who prepare, serve, and deliver meals; food that is donated; meal facilities provided at no cost (or “in-kind”) from community partners; and gasoline donated by meal delivery volunteers. Therefore, we also collected data on the monetary value of these resources—as estimated by programs—to include in our meal cost estimates. We differentiate these total per-meal costs (the sum of the cost of purchased items and the value of donated resources) from paid per-meal costs throughout the report.

All paid costs and values were converted to weekly amounts.

In order to calculate per-meal costs, the study team also collected information on the number of congregate and home-delivered meals served or delivered by the program in an average week.

The study team estimated each program's average per-resource cost by summing the products of resources used and their prices and dividing by the number of meals produced and distributed. Finally, the study team summed these average resource costs to estimate the total average cost of providing each type of meal at each program.

**8. How did the evaluation come up with HDM in rural areas were lower in cost compared to Congregate meal costs. In our program (which is rural) the HDM costs are a good bit higher than the congregate costs?**

- The study found that home-delivered meals provided in rural areas cost more than congregate meals served in rural areas, as you note is the case for your program. The number reported, reflect a grouping of meal providers by those that serve at least some of their meals in rural areas, show that home-delivered meals produced by service providers that deliver at least some of their meals in rural (or frontier) areas cost about \$10.86, per-meal on average, and that congregate meals produced by LSPs that serve at least some of their meals in rural (or frontier) areas cost \$10.52, per-meal on average.

**9. Why did we lose the Title III-D funds that funded nutrition education?**

- While this is a valid question, the Nutrition evaluation examined how programs operate (process evaluation) and the cost of providing meals (Cost study). The evaluation does not address the Federal budget process.

**10. Will this training be offered again?**

- The Webinar is available online at:  
[http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Site\\_Utilities/Standard\\_External\\_Disclaimer.aspx?redirect=https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/5564478084606609666](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/Site_Utilities/Standard_External_Disclaimer.aspx?redirect=https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/5564478084606609666)

**11. How are minorities included (Native Americans specifically)?**

- The process evaluation focused on site-level data and included a representative sample of sites that receive Older Americans ACT Title III-C funds. Sites were not specifically included or excluded based on whether they serve Native populations. ACL is currently planning an evaluation of its Title VI Tribal Grants Program which will focus on the impact of those programs on Native American elders.

**12. How does AoA/ACL plan to use the survey results to promote the need for increased funding for program delivery, especially related to the national aging demographics?**

- ACL is working on the best way to promote the results of this study and the ongoing outcome study which focusses on the impacts of the programs on meal recipients. Currently ACL has made the studies available to the public, is using the information from the studies in the budget justification process, and plans to report the data at professional conferences.

**13. But we provide 2 meals a day which leverages the other costs associated with delivery...**

- The study team collected information on the number of congregate and home-delivered meals served or delivered by programs in an average week. The analysis of the total average cost of meal, therefore, was based on the number of meals delivered by a program in an average week and not the number of days each week that the program delivers meals; therefore, the analysis accounts for efficiencies gained through delivering multiple meals to a single home on a given day.

**14. While our meal costs are lower, I answered what I am reimbursed from AAA. Our meal programs lose money each year because we are not reimbursed what it cost.**

- A main goal of the analysis was to determine what it costs service providers to provide congregate and home-delivered meals as compared with what they are reimbursed for the meals. This information may help sites make the case for higher reimbursement rates.

**15. Isn't part of the home-delivered rural cost lower due to frozen meal bulk delivery, please share?**

- The study team did not examine this specifically. However, the analysis of the total average cost of a home-delivered meal was based on the number of meals delivered by a program in an average week and not the number of days each week that the program delivers meals. Therefore, the analysis accounts for efficiencies gained through delivering multiple meals to a single home on a given day, such as the bulk delivery of frozen meals to client's homes.

**16. Do the reported Food borne illness numbers include 2015?**

- No, the numbers do not include 2015. The survey requested information from agencies on the number of outbreaks and the number of clients who got sick in the past 3 years. Data collection occurred late 2014 – early 2015, so for most agencies, the reporting period was 2012 to 2014.

**17. Did your cost calculations include the costs of assessments of clients?**

- Participating service providers were asked to report salary information for all staff and volunteers that produced, delivered, and/or served meals and staff and volunteers that oversaw those activities. They were also asked to report the time that these staff spent on the following activities: (a) activities related to congregate meals only, (b) activities related to home-delivered meals only, (c) activities jointly related to congregate and home-delivered meals, and (d) non-meal related activities. If providers considered time spent on client assessments

to fit within (a) through (d), they reported the time accordingly. Otherwise, the study did not collect information on the cost of assessments of clients.

**18. How do you calculate the \$ value per meal for volunteer time?**

- To collect data on volunteers to include in the analysis, the study team asked service providers to estimate and report the value of the salary that would be paid to each volunteer if the work performed by the volunteer was performed by paid staff, as estimated by LSPs. This would include volunteers who (a) provided centralized administrative support; (b) oversaw, planned, and prepared meals at congregate and home-delivered meal sites, and who served the congregate meals; and (c) delivered meals from off-site kitchens to meal sites and from meal sites to homes. The study team also collected information on the number of hours that each volunteer worked for the congregate and home-delivered meal programs or spent delivering meals along a selected route during a typical week.

**19. For on-site kitchens under LSPs researched was there a notable difference between sites that used group-purchasing organizations within a food distributor versus those that did not?**

- The study did not specifically assess the difference in costs between sites that used group-purchasing organizations versus those that did not. The study did, however, assess differences in the cost of congregate and home-delivered meals by meal preparation method, which included: (a) onsite preparation, (b) offsite preparation, and (c) vendor purchase meals or meals purchased with restaurant vouchers. The study found that congregate meals served by programs that prepare at least some of their congregate meals at central kitchens cost less (\$10.54), on average, than congregate meals served by programs that prepare at least some of their meals on-site (\$10.87) and those served by programs that purchase at least some of their meals from a vendor or through restaurant vouchers (\$11.53) (including the value of donated labor and resources). The study also found that, as with congregate meals, home-delivered meals provided by programs that produce at least some of them at a central kitchen cost less (\$10.14), on average, than home-delivered meals provided by programs that prepare at least some of them on-site at a congregate meal site (\$12.00) or that purchase at least some of them from a vendor (\$11.49).

**20. Will there be a cost tool from ACL that we would all use to calculate meal cost?**

- ACL staff are reviewing the tools and methods used in the cost study to see if they can be translated into a toolkit or other document that may be useful to sites for calculating their own meal costs.

**21. Is there information regarding what percentage of participants provided a donation for either congregate or home delivered meals?**

- The report does not contain the percentage of participants that provided a donation for either type of meal. The report contains several tables that present information on participant contributions to the NSP such as SUA policies related to participant contributions and LSPs' recommended contributions. It also contains information on the extent to which private pay services are offered.

**22. Did the evaluation look at any differences among AAAs who also directly provide meals (i.e., they are also LSPs)? If so, any interesting findings?**

- The report presented information separately for SUAs that functioned as AAAs and SUAs that did not function as AAAs, but did not present information separately for AAAs that directly provide meals and those AAAs that do not directly provide meals.

**23. In donations, are you including the value of cash donations at the site, too?**

- No, the study did not include the value of cash donations at the site. The value of donations included in the analysis were: volunteers who prepare, serve, and deliver meals; food that is donated; meal facilities provided at no cost (or “in-kind”) from community partners; and gasoline donated by meal delivery volunteers.

**24. For sites that provide many other services and programs, how does the facility cost (%) in the meal cost get calculated?**

- The meal cost analysis focused on costs most directly associated with meal provision, to the extent possible. When a meal facility was also used for many other functions, data collectors coached program staff to provide the most accurate estimates possible of the cost of the facility *used for the meal program* (versus the total cost of the facility).

**25. Does the study include programs providing 2 meals a day and 3 meals a day for HDM?**

- Yes. The analysis of the total average cost of a home-delivered meal was based on the number of meals delivered by a program in an average week and not the number of days each week that the program delivers meals. Therefore, the analysis accounts for efficiencies gained through delivering multiple meals to a single home on a given day, such as the bulk delivery of frozen meals to client’s homes.

**26. Is it necessary to have 2 separate meal costs? One for C1- and C2?**

- It is not necessary to have two separate meals costs; however, some meal programs sub-contract with one or more entities to provide only C-1 or C-2 meals. It is helpful for those programs to have separate information about the cost of each type of meal for planning, contracting, and budgeting purposes.

**27. What type of food borne illness reported?**

- The SUA, AAA, and LSP surveys did not collect information on the type of food borne illness reported. The report presented information on whether individual service providers were required to report incidents of food-borne illness in the NSP to another agency; the number of times outbreaks occurred; and types of policies for regulating and managing outbreaks.

**28. Does the report include the number of people waiting for HDM and the wait time?**

- The process evaluation report contains the percentage of LSPs with a waiting list for HDMs and the average number of people on the waiting list. It does not contain information on the wait time, though the survey data contain information on the longest time a person has been on the HDM waiting list in the LSPs' service areas.